

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

THE POSITIVIST CALENDAR.

THE NEW CALENDAR OF GREAT MEN. Biographies of the 558 Worthies of all Ages and Nations in the Positivist Calendar of Auguste Comte. Edited by Frederic Harrison. 12mo, pp. 644. (Macmillan & Co.)

Comte's philosophy of evolution rests primarily upon what he called the law of the three states. It was his theory that mankind has passed, or must pass, through these three states, the first of which he designates theological, the second metaphysical, and the third positive science. The first state begins with feticism, proceeds to polytheism, and ends with monotheism. In the next stage, the metaphysical, theology loses its influence, supernaturalism is discarded, and phenomena are explained rationally. Metaphysical speculation however falls in the search for inherent causes and forces, and the human mind presently abandons the futile attempt and takes refuge in positive science. All illusions are now given up, and civilized man rests content with such knowledge of the universe and the conditions of life as can be derived from actual experience. In order to illustrate his doctrine, and also apparently with the purpose of demonstrating that Positivism could have a Calendar as well as the old Religions which he had outgrown, Comte drew up a list of 558 "worthies," and arranged them in such a manner as to illustrate his theory of the conditions and progress of evolution. This list, so arranged, was then systematized in the form of a Calendar on the Comteist method, and now Mr. Frederic Harrison and a group of Positivists have prepared brief biographies for Comte's 558 worthies, and the results of their work appear in this volume.

It was hardly necessary for Mr. Harrison to insist, as he does in his preface, that it is not a biographical dictionary. It is simply a listing out of Comte's framework, and this listing out has the effect of throwing into high relief the oddities of the design and its incongruities. Avowedly the intention of Comte was to include only such persons as have done good to humanity in some way, and is perpetually excludes all revolutionaries, all destructive, all whose fame rests solely on naked uprightness or tyrannical deeds. No doubt there is much to be said for such a plan. Regarded from the highest ethical point of view it is only the constructive, the benevolent and wise who deserve to be honored and remembered. Who so, however, desires to comprise the evolution of the race must study with equal care the lives of the good and the bad, and so uncertain are consequences in this world that the best results will sometimes be found to have followed acts which were certainly not intended to produce them; while on the other hand the most benevolent intentions have frequently produced dire consequences. But Comte was nothing if not arbitrary, and if his Calendar fails to present a perfectly harmonious and consecutive series of illustrations it is nothing to him, though one cannot but think that his followers who wrote these biographies must have been staggered now and then by the strangeness of some of the master's selec-tions. The general plan of the book is indicated by the title. Each month or section treats a different subject, there being thirteen great divisions, namely, Theological Civilization, Ancient Poetry, Ancient Philosophy, Ancient Science, Military Civilization, Catholicism, Feudal Civilization, Modern Epic Poetry, Modern Industry, Modern Drama, Modern Philosophy, Modern Statesmanship, and Modern Science.

Mr. Harrison says: "The Calendar itself was regarded by the author as a work of art, carefully balanced and contrasted in its parts, and designed to convey a vivid impression of the sympathetic or organic character of Man's general progress. For this reason it takes note only of work of a constructive or creative kind; and the most eminent destructive, revolutionaries, and Protestants are not, as such, included, however useful for the time their solvent action may have been." But the difficulty with the reader is that Comte does not stick to his own principles. He admits the very people he has declared nihilistic, Washington and Cromwell, for example, are both here, and they were revolutionaries. Napoleon is excluded, but Caesar is present, and Hannibal. There are also not a few biographies of men who cannot seriously be said to have done anything for the progress of humanity. What, for instance, is the elegiac poet Tibullus doing in this gallery? And if Tibullus is admitted to the Comtean Pantheon, why should Catullus be excluded? We find few ancient female worthies, but among them are Sappho, of all women in the world. Hypatia is not thought worthy a place, but Amnon figures as a helper of the world's progress. One of the oddest features of the list is the admission of mythical personages, Cadmus, Theseus, Hercules, Manu, Romulus, Ulysses, Mano-Caput, Ossian, Prometheus, and various other phantom figures, fit through these pages. What did Comte mean by putting them among his worthies? How can their legends illustrate his doctrine? These be difficult questions. But why should he have stopped when he did? Having inserted Rabelais, why should he not have opened the door to Gargantua, whose legendary field far exceeds the uses made of him by the good doctor Alcephorus?

Bondu is here, and Nahometh, and Ignatius Loyola, and St. Theresa, and Saint Xavier, and many other saints; indeed Comte seems to have had a special "penchant" for hagiography; but Luther is absent, and Melanchton, though a niche has been found for Erasmus. Among the modern women the French naturally predominate. Joan of Arc is of course in evidence, and Madame de Sevigne does not appear out of place. But Madame de Staélharmay seems rather a dubious selection, if Madame de Staélharmay be rightly enrolled. Madame Roland has lost a good deal of her prestige, but the new light has been thrown on her since Comte drew up his Calendar, and this must be remembered. It is perhaps as well that he should have drawn the line at the close of the eighteenth century, or nearly so, though in doing so he necessarily left out the most distinguished men of science and representatives of modern civilization. One may possibly think that a few of these would have been more in point than the mythical personages the philosopher has so freely admitted, or than most of the makers of amorous verse whose influence upon human progress is so problematical. But such as it is the Comtean Calendar remains what the author made it, and none of his followers have ventured to add or omit a single name from the original 558. The function of such a work is not easy to define. It must depend for circulation upon readers who do not, as a rule, accept the Positive Philosophy. Even its arrangement militates against it, seeing that Comte's law of the three states, upon which that arrangement is based, is more and more clearly seen to be erroneous; and if it is erroneous what becomes of his method of illustrating the progress of evolution?

The Calendar may however have its uses. It may serve the purpose, if not of a guide to the student, at least of a suggestive help in the study of literature. We must warn students, nevertheless, not to put too much dependence upon these biographical sketches, both in the statement of facts and in inferences. Comte may take them all for simple truth, but there was a glamour about Comte which has influenced his disciples in a curious manner, and Mr. Frederic Harrison frequently gives examples of its power. Within certain strict limitations the New Calendar may be employed without danger of being misled by it, but the author's scheme of historical philosophy is not to be taken as established, and those who want the truth and the whole truth about the lives of the great men sketched in this volume must go to other and fuller sources.

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